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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002088

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON  
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USAID DCHA/OTI FOR RPORTER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: THE CHAVEZ, CARTER, CISNEROS RUMOR MILL

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARK WELLS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d  
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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) On June 18, President Hugo Chavez, former President Jimmy Carter and media magnate Gustavo Cisneros met behind closed doors for two hours at Fuerte Tiuna in Caracas. While Chavez, Cisneros and the Carter Center have all stated the meeting was simply a first step toward improved dialogue, the meeting has generated a flurry of media speculation over secret pacts and negotiations. End Summary.

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THE OFFICIAL STORY  
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2. (U) The meeting between Chavez, Carter and Cisneros was to have been conducted with total secrecy. Cisneros and Carter flew in on Cisneros' private jet to the VIP area of Simon Bolivar International airport outside of Caracas. However, an individual at the airport recognized Carter and alerted the media. The media followed Carter to Fuerte Tiuna and broke the story.

3. (U) The Carter Center released an official press statement on June 19, saying that the meeting between Chavez, Carter and Cisneros had been an attempt to establish a dialogue that would ensure the most appropriate climate for a constitutional process in Venezuela. During the June 20 edition of "Alo Presidente," his weekly television broadcast, Chavez commented that this meeting was the first step toward creating a plan to cooperatively combat poverty and improve health and education opportunities following the August 15 referendum. Chavez also assured the audience that he had not been negotiating secret deals with the opposition. One June 22, Cisneros issued a press release that, in general terms, corroborated these two stories.

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THE RUMOR MILL  
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4. (C) Pro-GOV daily "VEA", contended that Cisneros, who it characterized as one of the most hated people in Venezuela, had asked for the meeting to reconcile his differences with the GOV since his media outlets are losing their audience and that he recognizes Chavez will win the August 15 referendum. VEA also stated that this meeting has unsettled the leaders of Accion Democratica and COPEI, who felt that they were excluded from negotiations to determine the outcome of the referendum. Jose Alborno, Secretary General of the pro-Chavez Patria Por Todos (PPT) party, told poloff June 25 that Chavez told him the purpose of the meeting was to open up communication with private media, which Chavez sees as his principal opponent.

5. (U) Caracas daily "Ultimas Noticias" reported that the Chavistas are calling Chavez a traitor for meeting with Cisneros. Caracas daily "Tal Cual" pointed out that if Chavez is willing to meet with a person the GOV has repeatedly called "the lead coup plotter," the door has been opened for meetings with the Democratic Coordinator. Both speculated that this meeting is perhaps the first step toward a sustainable democratic dialogue in Venezuela.

6. (C) Solidaridad Deputy Ernesto Alvarenga met with poloff on June 23, and asserted that Chavez and Cisneros were negotiating Chavez's departure from power and subsequent asylum in the Dominican Republic. Alvarenga pointed to Dominican President Leonel Fernandez's June 21 visit with Chavez as evidence for his claims.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Everyone was caught unaware by the meeting. there were only three people present and each his offered their version. Chavez probably had hoped to keep it secret and avoid being seen "speaking to the Devil," as he put it.  
SHAPIRO

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